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For Sale: George Mason University

Alumni and Students Reveal Donor Influence over Hiring and Academic Programs

FAIRFAX, VA -- Documents obtained by alumni and students through the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) reveal that private donors have considerable influence over George Mason University's law school, economics department, and the Mercatus Center.

"Emails responsive to my request demonstrate that the Federalist Society for Law and Public Policy is influencing faculty and student selection, recommending and establishing legal programs, and redirecting large amounts of scholarship revenues at the law school," said Allison Pienta, a GMU Law graduate who made a FOIA requests to obtain a portion of these documents. "For a public law school, that's simply unacceptable."

Additional documents released to Samantha Parsons, another alumna of the university, reveal that donors were given shared decision-making power over faculty hires within the economics department and were able to recommend whether or not those faculty were retained or removed from their sponsored professorships. It appears that several current GMU economics faculty were hired under these unorthodox selection and review processes involving Mercatus staff, the Koch Foundation and/or other donors, and other GMU faculty. The agreements also suggest Mercatus had oversight over faculty and student research, including doctoral dissertations.

According to Bethany Letiecq, President of the American Association of University Professors at GMU, these documents confirm what many faculty and students have suspected for years. "Private donors have been provided influence over faculty affairs at our public university. This is a violation of the public trust--and a violation of the university system as a whole." Letiecq said.

Faculty and students at George Mason University have been raising concerns about donor influence, particularly influence of the Charles Koch Foundation, since 2011. The Charles Koch Foundation has donated almost \$200 million to over 400 universities since 2005-- George Mason University has received over 50% of those total donations.

"Charles Koch admits that universities are the most important thread in his web of political influence," said Samantha Parsons, who filed the FOIA request that produced the responsive economics department and Mercatus documents. "These documents show just how far the Koch network will go to make sure their university investments serve them-- even if that means breaking the rules."

[All responsive documents can be found on UnKoch My Campus' website.](http://unkochmycampus.org)